

# Okanogan County Voluntary Stewardship Program

Producer Packet



# DRAFT

# WHAT IS THE VSP?

---

Washington's Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW) requires all counties to identify and protect critical areas, including critical areas on agricultural lands. The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), offers a voluntary, incentive based approach for counties to meet that requirement.

In 2011, Okanogan County elected to participate in the VSP, along with 26 other counties in Washington. The VSP applies to land where agricultural activities occur, and provides a unique strategy to protect critical areas while also promoting agriculture. The VSP relies on voluntary participation by producers to meet the required protection of critical areas. Rather than creating new regulations, the VSP allows Okanogan County to take credit for the good stewardship that is already practiced by farmers and ranchers, while relying on education, outreach, and voluntary incentive programs to achieve further protection.



---

## Voluntary

The VSP is based on stewardship practices that landowners choose to implement of their own accord. No agricultural operator will be required to participate in voluntary stewardship practices as part of this program, and the program cannot require anyone to discontinue any agricultural activities legally existing before July 22, 2011 (*RCW 36.70A.702 (2)*).

## Non-regulatory

The VSP is not a regulatory program, and the completed VSP Work Plan will not be formally adopted by the Okanogan County Commissioners. The VSP does not grant the state or the county any additional regulatory authority (*RCW 36.70A.702 (4)*).

## Alternative strategy

For non-agricultural developments, critical areas are already protected under the Okanogan County Critical Area Ordinance, as required by the Growth Management Act (GMA). The VSP serves as an alternative to the regulatory approach of the GMA by allowing Counties to show protection of critical areas through voluntary stewardship measures. If the County chose not to participate in the VSP, or if the Okanogan County VSP Work Plan is not approved, Okanogan County will be required to update its Critical Area Ordinance to protect critical areas with respect to agricultural activities. *RCW 36.70A.700 (2(c))*, (*RCW 36.70A.735 (1&2)*).

# What are Critical Areas?

For further information, see the critical areas designations in the Okanogan County VSP Work Plan.

## Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas are lands and waters that provide habitat to fish and wildlife species within their natural geographic distribution. The protection goals of the VSP program specifically address areas where fish and wildlife species have been designated as *endangered*, *threatened*, or *sensitive* by the state or federal government, and areas designated as their primary association. Additional HCAs include habitats and species of local importance, lakes, rivers, streams categorized in water type 1-5, and naturally occurring ponds under 20 acres and their associated aquatic beds.

## Wetlands

Wetlands are areas inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater for at least part of the growing season and support vegetation adapted for life in saturated soil conditions (The current CAO for Okanogan County was adopted in 1994, and a new CAO is being developed to address updated GMA standards).

## Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

CARAs are areas that have a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for drinking water, including aquifers vulnerable to contamination or that could reduce supply by reducing recharge rates and water availability.

## Frequently Flooded Areas

Frequently Flooded Areas are floodways and associated floodplains that have a one (1%) percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year. Frequently Flooded Areas are identified based on FEMA Flood Rate Insurance Maps. Most of the Frequently Flooded areas in Okanogan County are found in Okanogan 49 WRIA and Methow 48 WRIA.

## Geologically Hazardous Areas

Geologically Hazardous Areas are areas that are susceptible to erosion, sliding, earthquake, or other geological events. In Okanogan County, these include areas with “severe rill” and “inter-rill” erosion hazard, and areas with a 30% or greater slope. Channel erosion and bank erosion a long rivers, streams, and creeks is another concern in Okanogan County.

# What are Agricultural Activities?

The definition of **agricultural activities** used for VSP is from RCW 90.58.065, and includes the following:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Producing, breeding, or increasing agricultural products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining agricultural lands under production or cultivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie dormant because:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the land is enrolled in a local, state, or federal conservation program;</li> <li>the land is subject to a conservation easement;</li> <li>as a result of adverse agricultural market conditions;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rotating and changing agricultural crops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining, repairing, and replacing agricultural equipment</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducting agricultural operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining, repairing, and replacing agricultural facilities</li> </ul>	



- Allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie fallow in which it is plowed and tilled but left unseeded

# STEWARDSHIP CHECKLIST

## Promoting Agriculture Viability and Protecting Critical Areas

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) is an optional, incentive-based approach to protecting critical areas while promoting agriculture. This checklist assists in evaluating the goals and benchmarks of the VSP Work Plan and serves as an individual stewardship plan referenced in the VSP law. **The VSP Work Plan aims to achieve protection and enhancement of critical areas through voluntary, incentive based measures by agricultural producers. This means increased flexibility for producers and fewer regulations.** Your time and patience in carefully and accurately filling out this checklist is much appreciated by the VSP Workgroup and Staff.

### Provide Location Information

**Instructions:** Review the definitions of agricultural activities and critical areas. Visually review potential critical areas on or near your property, such as ponds, streams, wet areas, steep slopes, etc.

1. What area is your farm or ranch located within?

- Methow (WRIA 48)
- Chelan (WRIA 47)
- Okanogan River (WRIA 49)
- Nespelem River (WRIA 51)
- Sanpoil River (WRIA 52)
- Lower Lake Roosevelt (WRIA 53)
- Kettle River (WRIA 60)
- Chelan (WRIA 47)



2. Identify potential critical areas intersecting with agricultural activities on your property:

- A. fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas
- B. wetlands
- C. frequently flooded areas
- D. geologically hazardous areas
- E. critical aquifer recharge areas

**Note:** Checking one or more critical areas that may *potentially* be located on or adjacent to the property does not constitute an official determination of such a feature. It is helpful in filling out the rest of the checklist.

This packet is solely intended to assist in the implementation of the Voluntary Stewardship Program by the Okanogan County VSP Workgroup and Okanogan Conservation District. The information disclosed in this document is not applicable outside of the strictly voluntary nature of VSP, and is not to be used in any regulatory capacity whatsoever.

## Management types

### **Soil Management**

Protect and enhance soil health and prevent soil erosion.

### **Water Management**

Protect and enhance surface water quality and limit movement of sediment and other materials into water bodies.

### **Range Management**

Sustaining yields of rangeland while protecting and improving range resources of soil, water, plant, and wildlife.

### **Habitat Management**

Protecting and enhancing natural resources to provide habitat for fish and wildlife species.

## What stewardship practices are being implemented on your farm or ranch?

Key Stewardship Practices Examples	I do This	I'm interested in this	Does not apply	Not interested	Average units/year (acres/feet/other)
<b>Soil Management</b>					
Conservation Crop Rotation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cover Crop	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Residue and Till Management, No Till	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Mulching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Water Management</b>					
Irrigation Water Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sprinkler System	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pumping Plant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Groundwater testing to determine quality of ground water supply	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Nutrient Management</b>					
Nutrient Management: managing excess nutrients to minimize pollution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Composting Facility: structure to properly dispose organic matter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Animal Mortality Facility: facility for disposal of animal carcasses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Range Management</b>					
Range Planting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Prescribed Grazing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Watering Facility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Spring Developments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Access Road	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Access Control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Heavy Use Protection Area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Key Stewardship Practices Examples	I do This	I'm interested in this	Does not apply	Not interested	Average units/year (acres/feet/other)
<b>Habitat Management</b>					
Conservation Cover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Critical Area Planting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Stream Habitat Improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Channel Stabilization	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tree/Shrub Establishment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Restoration of Rare and Declining Habitats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Fish and Wildlife Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Fish Screens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Culvert/Bridge/Stream Crossings Upgrades	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Fence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Pest Management</b>					
Integrated Pest Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Other ideas for stewardship practices:</b>					



Fence Markers



Off-channel Watering



Access Control protects water quality and habitat

**Stewardship Practice**

Stewardship practices (also called conservation practices) are practical methods of agricultural land management or improvements designed to protect or enhance natural resources – soil, water, air, energy, habitat — while allowing efficient and productive use of the land. Visit <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/toc.aspx?CatID=16204> to view NRCS practice standards and definitions.

## Step 3: Monitoring

A technical assistance provider, coordinated by Okanogan County Conservation District, will contact you annually about the conservation practices installed. You may request a field visit to obtain feedback on improving the effectiveness of the conservation practices.

## Ideas for Agriculture Viability Incentives and Outcomes

The VSP is designed to promote the viability of agriculture over the long term and to avoid unnecessary local critical area regulations. due to the prevalence of conservation practices undertaken by willing producers. Producers may find cost-matching programs with technical providers (see contact information below).

What incentives could help you achieve your goals for your farm?

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Education and Technical Assistance

The Okanogan County VSP aims to ensure that adequate education and technical assistance is provided to agricultural operators in Okanogan County.

Do you feel that there is adequate access to educational materials and technical assistance regarding critical areas and agriculture?

- Yes
- No

If you answered "No", what additional resources would be helpful?

---

---

---

---

### Other Resources:

Okanogan Conservation District: <https://www.okanogancd.org/>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/>

USDA Farm Service Agency: <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/>

Methow Conservancy: <http://www.methowconservancy.org/>





## For Information & Assistance

**Lead Technical Assistance Provider:** Okanogan Conservation District  
<https://www.okanogancd.org/> (509)-422-0855